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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/CE

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PL](#) [PREL](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: POLISH FOREIGN MINISTER CRITICIZES RUSSIAN
EXERCISE

REF: MOSCOW 2747

Classified By: AMBASSADOR LEE FEINSTEIN FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (SBU) The controversy sparked by FM Sikorski's reported call for U.S. troops in Poland "as a shield against Russian aggression," although subsequently retracted by Interfax, was widely covered in the media and distracted from an otherwise disciplined and positive trip for the FM to Washington. Despite the retraction, Sikorski himself pointed out that there was nothing new in his position and that Poland has long sought a shift of NATO infrastructure to its territory. Sikorski made this point repeatedly in Washington. During the November 4 CSIS conference, Sikorski strongly alluded to Warsaw's desire for an enhanced U.S./NATO presence in Poland in the context of the Russian-Belarusian "Zapad" exercise. He told the audience that he did not know what kind of message Russia was trying to send with an exercise that took place only 250 kilometers from Warsaw. The foreign minister also quoted Zbigniew Brzezinski, who observed that what really assured Germany during the Cold War was not Article 5, but the presence of 300,000 American troops. Sikorski emphasized that "we have, at the latest count, six American troops" in Poland, not including U.S. Embassy staff in Warsaw.

MFA REACTS, INTERFAX RETRACTS

¶2. (SBU) On November 6, MFA Spokesman Piotr Paszkowski demanded retraction of the Interfax report, saying it "in a completely and unjustified fashion attributed words to the minister that he never uttered." He added, "it seems in this case we are dealing with intentional manipulation . . . because the report elicited, which is perhaps what was intended, numerous and wide-spread reactions." Meanwhile, Sikorski emphasized that he said nothing new at the conference -- Poland has long sought a shift of NATO infrastructure to its territory. Interfax retracted the report with an apology on November 9.

RECENT UPSWING IN RELATIONS

¶3. (C) Sikorski's comments come in the context of a more nuanced Polish approach to Russia. FM Lavrov visited Warsaw in September 2008, demonstrating the two countries' ability to discuss difficult issues like the Georgia conflict, while pursuing improved ties. PM Putin attended the commemoration for the 70th anniversary of the outbreak of World War II in Gdansk in September 2009, at which time the two countries signed an agreement reopening Vistula Bay ship traffic to Kaliningrad. And despite the controversy generated by the original November 5 Interfax report, the Polish-Russian Commission on Difficult Issues held constructive discussions on November 9 regarding a joint book on historical issues to

be released next year, the establishment of two historical institutes, and a joint Russian Orthodox and Polish Roman Catholic prayer for the victims of the Katyn massacre and Stalinist regime.

COMMENT

14. (C) With the Interfax retraction, Polish and Russian officials seem to be seeking to move past this incident. The controversy took some of the sheen off of Sikorski's otherwise well-handled trip to Washington, during which he publicly supported the new MD plan, describing it as better than the first one. He also depicted U.S. Polish relations in a positive light and downplayed the cancellation of his meeting with the Secretary.

FEINSTEIN